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ABSTRACT

This University of California, Los Angeles, Fernald School project was designed to evaluate the impact of an intensive, individualized remedial program upon the learning skills of disadvantaged children. In addition to the focus on learning skills, aspiration levels and self-attitudes, a second objective was to compare learning problems of disadvantaged and middle-class students. The subjects were elementary and junior high students, who were placed in both summer school and full-year programs. The full-year program group at junior high level showed the most improvement. These initial findings indicated that disadvantaged children with learning problems were responsive to individualized instruction programs. Data also showed that misbehavior, poor attendance and unsustained effort are reflective of avoidance motivation rather than a lack of interest in and concern about academic achievement. (KG)

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Empirical Evaluation of a Program for the Remediation of Learning Disabilities in Culturally Disadvantaged Youth

Some Issues and Data *

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For the past year and a half, the Fernald School at U.C.L.A. has undertaken a research, demonstration and training program concerned with the remediation of learning problems in culturally disadvantaged children. Since this project is still under way, the present paper constitutes an initial report, focusing on some of the key psychological and educational issues which have been generated in the course of this program. The study was designed to meet two broad objectives. The first was to evaluate the impact of an intensive, individualized remedial program upon the learning skills, aspiration levels and self-attitudes of culturally disadvantaged children and the second objective was to compare their learning problems with those presented by the middle class population who constitute the basic source of most of our information about learning disorders.

Procedures.

The present observations are based upon two separate populations,

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one which participated in a six week summer remedial program and the other, attending for the full academic year. For the summer phase, twenty elementary and twenty junior high school children from disadvantaged areas were bussed to the Fernald School during the summers of '66 and '67. The children were distributed over seven separate classes along with advantaged children who also manifested learning disorders. The disadvantaged youngsters met the standard criteria for admission to the School. The child had to be of at least average intelligence and one and one half or more years retarded in basic school skills; children with severe neurological or severe emotional disturbances were excluded.

In addition, the disadvantaged children lived in areas designated as poverty pockets. Two thirds of the children were Negroes while the remaining third were divided between Mexican-American and so-called "Anglos."

For both the summer and the year programs, the disadvantaged sample was matched with an advantaged sample for age, I.Q. and achievement. The children selected for the academic year program were grouped into matched triplets and from each triplet, one child was randomly assigned to the Fernald School, another child to an Educational Enrichment Program to be conducted in their own home schools, and the third child to a Control group. Sixty children were included in this phase of the study, twenty in each of the three groups.

Time permits only a brief description of the Fernald School program and the Enrichment program conducted at the child's neighbor-

hood school. The Fernald School was established by the Psychology Department as a research and training center for the diagnosis and treatment of learning disorders. The school stresses individualization of instruction. On the basis of assessment procedures, individual objectives, materials and methods are selected for each child. The School Enrichment Program, conducted at the home school, focused on the improvement of reading and language skills. Children were seen by tutors approximately three hours each week, for which the same process of individualization was employed. In addition to the tutoring, social work contact was established with the family. Various combinations of measures have been used during each of the three evaluation periods. A list of these instruments and the occasions on which they were administered is presented in Table 1.

Research Issues and Findings.

Our findings, though preliminary, point to a number of interesting, and, in our view, significant propositions and conclusions. Thus, it is frequently stated that the school represents a middle class institution and the "culturally disadvantaged" child does poorly in school because his family rejects this institution and its objectives. Our experience suggests that the contrary is true; that the lower class family places a high value upon educational objectives. For the summer '66 project, 40 out of 44 families that were initially contacted agreed to send their children to the special summer program that was to begin, in many instances, within a few days after the family was contacted. This remarkable degree of responsiveness to an educational opportunity

for their children was repeated by parents of culturally disadvantaged children who were contacted in connection with the full year program.

Diverse sources of data further indicate that the disadvantaged child, as well as his parents, values school achievement. Thus, the Semantic Differential measures reflected positive attitudes toward teachers and school. One can, of course, question the verbal statements made by the children on the Semantic Differential or in response to an interview. It can be argued that the school record of these children--their poor academic performance, poor attendance, and conflict with school authorities--are more valid indices of their attitudes than their verbal statements. However, our observations indicate that, given the proper circumstances, these disadvantaged children who have had a history of school failure, will work diligently and strive toward achievement of academic goals. The excellent attendance record attained by the children is indicative of this positive behavior.

Further insight into the complex nature of the disadvantaged children's attitudes and values pertaining to school and to educational achievement is provided by the response to the Test Anxiety Scale for Children. This scale was developed by Sarason and his associates to measure the degree of anxiety and concern that children at different age levels have about academic achievement, examinations, and related school matters. The disadvantaged youth, far from being unconcerned about school, manifest, especially among the older boys, considerable anxiety, and significantly more so than the advantaged

children. Their school deficiencies, then, may not be simply a function of low interest or a "don't care" attitude, but rather appear to be associated with fear of failure and, one might infer, strong avoidance tendencies in connection with school matters.

Much has been written regarding the conflict between the values of the middle class teacher and the values of the lower class child. Yet we appear to be suggesting a similarity in basic values. It is helpful to distinguish between two possible sources of conflict--what may be grossly labeled as Conflicts of Manners versus Conflicts of Morals. The term morals is used loosely to refer to core values such as academic attainment, loyalty, social status, honesty, and concern for one's fellow man. By manners is meant the instrumental behaviors and response styles used to achieve these core values. This distinction between Manners and Morals may become blurred in some situations but can still be usefully applied to a great many social actions. Our experiences with the disadvantaged children at the Fernald School suggest that conflicts between the middle class school and the lower class child primarily occur over issues of manners rather than differences in morals. Further, violations of norms pertaining to manners typically elicit greater affect than violation of morals. Compare, for example, the response to a child's use of profanity versus cheating on an examination. The choice of profanity as an example of a violation of manners rather than morals may not be an altogether happy one since profanity may have moral implications. Other, less dramatic, examples of disturbing habits or manners are seen in the tendency of these children to resort to physical rather than verbal aggression

when provoked, in the tendency to avoid discussion or communication with teachers, and in slovenly dress. We do not wish to underestimate the importance and disturbing effects of deviant manners and habits. What has been more impressive to us, however, is the fundamental similarity between teachers and children, whether advantaged or disadvantaged, in the significance placed upon the school as an institution, and upon school achievement. Our experience with these children coupled with the Test Anxiety data indicate that the apparent lack of interest in school, inadequate motivation, and poor attendance are symptoms of fear and avoidance rather than expressions of a different value orientation. They are responses which enable the child to avoid and escape the painful frustration and loss of self-esteem resulting from continued failure experience.

Although it has been argued that the disadvantaged child values educational achievement as highly as his advantaged counterpart, this does not imply that the strivings and objectives of each group are equivalent. It is perhaps realistic or adaptive for a culturally disadvantaged child with learning problems to aspire for a lesser vocational goal than an advantaged child with similar learning problems. Perhaps the latter is being unrealistic. Yet, there is a certain poignancy in the finding that the disadvantaged child selects occupations with significantly lower socio-economic status than those chosen by the advantaged child, although these two groups were selected so that they were equivalent with respect to ability and educational performance.

We have stated that the two groups were matched for ability.

This holds for most of the intellectual dimensions which have been assessed. However, the measures of Auditory discrimination and Visual perceptual judgments reflect significantly poorer performance by the disadvantaged, suggesting the need for methods of remediation aimed at improving these perceptual skills.

From the very first day, it was apparent that the school setting influenced the behavior of the boys. The children tested at their home schools were restless, defensive, and negativistic. The matched group of children tested at the Fernald School were obliging, task oriented, and performed at a higher level. Children have a wide repertoire of responses available to them. Placed in the right environment desired responses may be elicited, not always, to be sure, but often enough to justify a search for the proper environmental setting.

The diligence and cooperativeness of the disadvantaged group at the Fernald School were reflected in the educational changes that were achieved following completion of the program. The data for the '66 summer group indicated an average gain of about 5 months in Reading and Arithmetic CAT scores for the disadvantaged children over a six week summer remedial session. The gains for the '67 summer session are somewhat smaller, but comparable, averaging about 3.9 months for the basic skill areas assessed by the CAT. Of primary interest are the changes that occurred for the groups participating in the 1966-67 school year program. The disadvantaged junior high group at the Fernald School showed increases of from one to 1.3 years in basic skills. These increments are about twice as great as the corresponding

changes in the Enrichment and Control groups. The latter did not differ in level of improvement. The differences at the elementary level are smaller with the exception of a significantly greater increase in arithmetic in the disadvantaged elementary Fernald School group as compared to the Controls. The performance of the junior high boys attending the Fernald School is particularly noteworthy since the summer '66 data had reflected relatively greater changes in the elementary as compared to the junior high boys. The fact that a moderate degree of success was achieved with a junior high school sample that has had a long history of school difficulties is encouraging.

In summary, the present results indicate that disadvantaged children with learning problems are responsive to an accepting environmental setting and individualized instructional programs. The data suggest that misbehaviors, poor attendance, and minimum expenditures of effort by many of these children are reflective of avoidance motivation rather than a lack of interest in and concern about educational achievement.

Not all of the findings attest to the special utility of the program provided by the Fernald School. The effects at the elementary level were small. In addition, the Enrichment Program failed to produce much change and clearly requires better integration with the child's classroom program. It would be ingenuous, however, to expect simple, spectacular resolutions to complex, persistent problems. There have been a number of interesting findings and suggestive leads which have emerged from the project. It is anticipated that the ensuing years of this program will buttress and refine these findings and hopefully, contribute to the remediation of learning difficulties in culturally disadvantaged children.

Table 1A

EVALUATION PERIOD DURING WHICH ONE-TIME MEASURES WERE ADMINISTERED

Measure	Evaluation Period		
	Summer 1966	Academic Year 1966-67	Summer 1967
Sociometric Instrument	X		
Full Range Picture Vocabulary Test	X		
Visual Motor Gestalt Test	X		
The Coloured and Standard Progressive Matrices	X	X	X
Auditory Discrimination Test		X	
Extrinsic-Intrinsic Motivation Scale	X	X	
Locus of Control			X
Teacher Rating		X	
Witkin Rod and Frame Test		X	

Table 1B

EVALUATION PERIOD DURING WHICH PRE-POST MEASURES WERE ADMINISTERED

Measure	Evaluation Period		
	Summer 1966	Academic Year 1966-67	Summer 1967
California Achievement Test	X	X	X
Test Anxiety Scale for Children	X	X	X
Expectancy of Success	X	X	X
Vocational Checklist		X	X
Ethnic Attitudes Instrument		X	X
Sociometric Instrument		X	X
Semantic Differential	X	X	